

space of about 150 years, modern man, holding up the mirror to the age of the mediaeval schoolmen and the mediaeval popes, could hardly recognise his great-grandfather as intellectually of the same spirit as himself.

These 150 years constitute, potentially at least, one of the most momentous periods in the history of the world.

The period was full of life, intensity, in many departments of human effort. It bore within it the seeds of a many-sided

revolution—political, intellectual, social, religious.

It witnessed the revival of letters and the invention of printing,

and gave a new hemisphere, a new art, a new culture, and the

beginning of a new science to the world. It can boast of

great artists and scholars*, great inventors and explorers,

great reformers, and even revolutionists, great men of action as well

as great men of thought. It was a period in which a new

world was born as well as discovered, in which the mediaeval

gave place to the modern age. And the change is apparent

all along the line of human activity. In the political sphere

it witnessed the development, if not the birth, of absolute

monarchy, for it embraced the rise of the monarchic power of

a Ferdinand and Isabella, of a Henry VII., of a Louis XL, of

the Medici at Florence, and the Sforza at Milan, of the petty

sovereigns that virtually transformed the empire into a

number of small monarchies. This development of the

modern absolute monarchy was in itself a revolution—a

revolution at the expense of mediaeval constitutionalism,

which, by reason of its anarchic tendencies, its antagonism to

national unity, failed to assert itself against the central power

in Spain, France, Germany, and England. From the point of

view of political liberty, this might be a
revolution in the
wrong direction, but it nevertheless tended to
some extent in
the direction of progress. It at least substituted
centralised
authority for aristocratic anarchy in England,
France, and
Spain; and if it cannot be said to have been a
revolution in
favour of political liberty, liberty, as understood by
the feudal
nobility, hardly deserved a revolution in its
favour. And
where, as in Bohemia, the cause of liberty was
identified
with popular or national aspirations, it was
weakened by a
fanatic, impractical spirit, which would have
made its triumph
a questionable boon from the standpoint of order
and stability.
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